UNITED
NATIONS

CRC

Convention on the
Rights of the Child

Distr.
GENERAL

CRC/C/15/Add.50
13 February 1996

Original: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Eleventh session

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES
UNDER ARTICLE 44 OF THE CONVENTION

Concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: Iceland

1. The Committee considered the initial report of Iceland (CRC/C/11/Add.6 and HRI/CORE/1/Add.26) at its 272nd, 273rd and 274th meetings (CRC/C/SR.272, 273 and 274), held on 16 and 17 January 1996, and adopted* the following concluding observations.

A. Introduction

2. The Committee expresses its appreciation to the State party for its comprehensive report, established in accordance with the Committee's guidelines. It welcomes the self-critical approach taken by the Government of Iceland in preparing its report. The Committee also welcomes the written answers to the Committee's list of issues (CRC/C.11/WP.8), which were submitted on time.

3. The presence of a high-level delegation enabled the Committee to engage in a constructive dialogue with those directly involved in the implementation of the Convention.

---

* At the 287th meeting, held on 26 January 1996.

B. Positive factors

4. The Committee welcomes the statement made by the delegation that the declarations made by Iceland upon the ratification of the Convention on its articles 9, paragraph 1, and 37 (c), may be reviewed, with a view to their eventual withdrawal.

5. The Committee notes with appreciation the strengthening of the protection of human rights in general and of children's rights in particular in the Constitution; it particularly welcomes the inclusion in the Constitution of a provision directly based on article 3, paragraph 2, of the Convention. It also notes that important international instruments, such as the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction and the European Convention on Recognition and Enforcement of Decisions Concerning Custody of Children, have recently been ratified by Iceland. The commitment of the authorities to ratify in the near future ILO Convention 138 on the Minimum Age for Employment is also noted with satisfaction.

6. The Committee welcomes the establishment of the Office of Children's Ombudsman and its role of disseminating among the public information on the rights of the child and of encouraging compliance with the international instruments ratified by Iceland concerning those rights, among them the Convention.

7. The Committee also welcomes the establishment of the Government Agency for Child Protection in March 1995. Its functions, as a centralized authority providing the Child Welfare Committees with improved support, preparing training programmes for members of the Child Welfare Committees, or informing foster-parents and preparing them to assume their tasks, are of great importance for a better implementation of the rights enshrined in the Convention.

8. The Committee acknowledges the efforts undertaken by the authorities to find creative ways to ensure the effective dissemination of the Convention, such as the establishment of an interministerial working group to decide on the form the publicity campaigns on the Convention should take. It also acknowledges the commitment of the authorities to strengthening their relationships and cooperation with non-governmental organizations working in the field of the protection and promotion of children's rights.

9. With regard to the high number of domestic or other accidents whose victims are children in Iceland, the Committee welcomes the establishment of the Accident Prevention Council in 1994.

10. The Committee welcomes the initiative of the Ministry of Education to appoint an interministerial committee to formulate overall policy with regard to immigrants and to coordinate the authorities' activities in relation to immigrant issues. The establishment, under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, since the autumn 1993 of a special programme, for the benefit of teachers at all levels (from nursery schools to secondary schools and adult education), on education for immigrants is also welcomed by the Committee.

11. The recent developments in the area of refugee matters are considered by the Committee to be promising; the establishment of a Refugee Council to organize the acceptance and arrival of refugees in Iceland, with special attention being given to child refugees, and to deal with asylum seekers whose requests are pending before the authorities is viewed as a very positive measure. Likewise, the Committee welcomes the legal change abolishing the requirement that a person seeking Icelandic citizenship has to add an Icelandic name to his or her original name.

12. With regard to article 7, paragraph 2, of the Convention, the Committee takes note with satisfaction of the intention expressed by the delegation that a government proposal dealing expressly with the status of stateless children will be presented to the Althing in due time.

C. Principal subjects of concern

13. The Committee wishes to emphasize that the Convention provides for the protection and care of children, and in particular for the recognition of the child as the subject of his or her own rights. In this connection, the Committee notes that this essential aspect of the Convention is not yet fully reflected in Icelandic law.

14. While the Committee notes that the Convention is not an integral part of the national legislation, it is concerned that gaps might exist in regard to the reflection of the Convention in national laws and regulations.

15. The Committee stresses the importance of the coordination of sectoral policies of the different governmental agencies and departments dealing with child issues. In view of the large autonomy of the local authorities in the field, among others, of child protection and welfare, the Committee also notes with concern the absence of a mechanism to coordinate the decisions taken and the activities undertaken in this field between the central and local authorities and between the local authorities themselves.

16. The Committee is particularly preoccupied about the disparities of the budget allocations in the field of child protection and welfare between different administrative regions, which may lead to discrimination between children living in different areas, for example in the field of education and after school-time care.

17. While noting the steps taken to disseminate the text of the Convention among students at all school levels, the Committee notes that the inclusion of human rights in general, and of children's rights in particular, as a subject in schools and universities is still pending.

18. The lack of comprehensive and systematic training programmes for professionals working for and with children, such as teachers or social workers, or who are in contact with children, such as policemen, lawyers, magistrates or doctors, on children's rights and on the exercise of their rights, is also a matter of concern to the Committee.

19. The Committee notes that the best interest of the child to spend time in his/her family environment may be infringed by the long working hours of

parents and that sufficient measures have not been taken to prevent children from being alone at home during their parents' working hours. In this connection, the insufficient availability of places in nursery schools is of concern.

D. Suggestions and recommendations

20. The Committee wishes to encourage the State party to consider the possibility of withdrawing its declarations on the Convention, and would like to be kept informed of developments on this matter.

21. The Committee recommends that steps be taken to have all the substantive provisions of the Convention reflected in national laws or regulations, so that the full protection of the rights enshrined in the Convention is ensured.

22. The Committee recommends that the State party establish a mechanism to enhance the coordination of governmental policies as well as those of central and local authorities in the field of children's rights, with a view to eliminating possible disparities or discrimination in the implementation of the Convention and ensuring that the Convention is fully respected in all parts of Iceland.

23. The Committee encourages the State party to pursue and further develop its policy aimed at disseminating information and at increasing awareness of the Convention. It also urges the authorities to integrate the Convention and children's rights into the training curricula of professional groups dealing with children and in the school and university curricula.

24. The Committee recommends that the budgetary allocations be ensured to the maximum extent of available resources in the light of article 4 of the Convention. In this connection, due attention should also be paid to articles 2 and 3 of the Convention, with a view to avoiding the risk of disparities in services for children in different parts of the country. The Committee also recommends that the State party consider strengthening international cooperation and assistance, with a view to enhancing the promotion and protection of the rights of the child.

25. The Committee suggests that appropriate measures be taken to counter the inequalities between men and women with regard to remuneration, since it may be detrimental to the child, in particular in homes headed by a single woman.

26. The Committee recommends a further review of the procedures with regard to custody or to the separation of the child from his or her parents, in order to ensure that the best interests of the child are always a primary consideration.

27. Finally, in the light of article 44, paragraph 6, of the Convention, the Committee recommends that the report be made widely available to the public in Iceland and that publicity be given to its consideration by the Committee through the publication of the relevant summary records of the discussion and of the concluding observations of the Committee.